

SIR EDWIN ARNOLD, BUDDHISM, AND THE FUTURE LIFE.

In "The Light of Asia" we do not of course, charge the author with taking more than the license of a poet and literary artist; but in much of his epic-picture of the life and teachings of Buddha he has unquestionably taken this license. This is shown not so much in his account of the ethics and vaunted spiritual wisdom of Guatama; though even here poetic appreciation has run into extravagance. A system of ethics, to be salutary, ought to be based on a motive higher than the satisfaction to the individual derived from the exercise of virtue. In the case of well-constituted minds, to exercise self-denial and do good deeds are acts which are no doubt self-pleasing. But these acts, to be worth anything, must have the sanction of law and be done from an intelligent sense of duty. What sense of duty can a man feel whose religion, if it escapes ceremonialism, inculcates no loftier ideal than a contemplative human being, who, if he attains the bliss of Nirvana, enjoys it in the repose of unconsciousness? Again, moral excellence is to be commended, but only where it represents a virtue we have put into exercise, not where it is merely set up for admiration. In Buddha's philosophy his followers are exhorted to cultivate "right aims, right views, right thinking," etc., but chiefly that they may realize that sorrow is inherent in human life, and that happiness, if not wisdom, is attained by deliverance from conscious existence. What is this but a gospel of despair? How much is humanity helped by finding out that life is a struggle and a burden, when no source here of comfort or deliverance is revealed, and no prospect is held out of a hereafter?

Nor do we find treasure-houses of wisdom in either Brahminical or Zoroastrian gospels. In none of these ancient religions do we find the resemblance to Christianity worth a moment's consideration. Here and there, it is true, there are beautiful and often touching passages that seem to recall the words of the Master, but for the most part they are the mere expressions of humanity's weakness and need, without the healing balm of Divine sympathy and succour. In nothing more is there a sharper contrast between these lauded Eastern religions and Christianity than in the doctrine of a future life. Particularly is this the case with the religion of Buddha. What is it to renounce the world and cultivate the ideal virtues of gentleness and calm, if these graces have no future field for their exercise than a state of torpor qualified by annihilation? To do Sir Edwin Arnold justice, it must be said that this is not his reading of Buddha's gospel: both his moral sense and his literary faculty revolt from such an interpretation of Guatama's creed. But will what is known of the doctrinal system of Buddhism bear out Sir Edwin's poetical rendering of it? We venture to doubt it. Is it affirmed that it recognizes a Supreme Being, and teaches that man has a soul and has relations with that Being? Does it inculcate belief in a personal immortality, or has it practically anything to say of a future life? "When the soul enters Nirvana, is it not extinguished like a lamp blown out?"

Sir Edwin Arnold does his best to read a future life, if not immortality, into the creed of Buddha. It is this, together with his apotheosis of the ethics of Buddhism, that gives the special charm to "The Light of Asia." Elsewhere, however, he admits that man is not by any means convinced as yet of his immortality. Does not this seem to hint that Buddhism, at least, has failed to inculcate the doctrine? As if in doubt on the point, Sir Edwin has written a thoughtful essay advocating, upon natural grounds, the reasonable hope of a future life. The little brochure—"Death and Afterwards"—is, we fear, not so well known as its merits deserve. With the reader's permission, we shall utilize the little space we have left in its examination. We do so the more readily as there is not only a peculiar fascination in the subject, but there is an idyllic grace in the way in which it is presented.

"If we were all sure," says Sir Edwin, "what a difference it would make! A simple 'yes,' pronounced by the edict of immensely developed science; one word from the lips of some clearly accredited herald sent on convincing authority, would turn nine-tenths of the sorrows of earth into glorious joys, and abolish quite as large a proportion of the faults and vices of mankind." Can we doubt this? Yet is there not a purpose in leaving man, as a responsible moral agent, in the dark, free to work out his salvation as the Deity evidently intended, through the exercise of faith and trust? Revelation, it has been well said, does not affect to provide mathematical demonstration of immortality. It will give assurance of a future life only upon its own terms. It has been the divine purpose, evidently, that we should know here only such an amount of truth as Omniscience saw was best for us; and, read in the light of revelation, the arguments for a future life afford powerful confirmation of those derived from reason.

Independently of Christian revelation, it is interesting to enquire how belief in a future life originated. Can we say that it is more than an intuition, an instinct? Can we go further and claim it as "one of the primary certainties of the human mind?" "No safe logic proves it," exclaims Sir Edwin Arnold, "and no entirely accepted voice from some farther world proclaims it. There is a restless instinct, an unquenchable hope, a silent discontent with the very best of transitory pleasures, which perpetually disturb our scepticism or shake our resignation; but only a few feel quite certain that they will never cease to exist." Yet on the other hand, our author points out,

there are assurances, "worth nothing, perhaps, philosophically, and rendered no wh't more valuable if one had studied all the creeds and mastered all the systems of earth, which none of all these can give or take away." The conviction that death does not end all lies deep in the foundation of human nature. Does our reason delude us when we wonder why matter and motion, which the scientists tell us are indestructible, should be preserved, if consciousness and intelligence, when the earthly career is over, are to be blotted out? Besides the universal recoil from the very thought of extinction, there are abundant reasons for deeming it utterly inconsistent with the apparent scheme of things. Why, it is asked, are we endowed with aspirations and longings if it is not intended that we should have the means of satisfying them? Man, admittedly, is endowed with powers far beyond the necessary requirements of this earthly existence; why? if not that the time and field will come for their ample employment. Our innate sense of justice, which calls for compensation in another world for inequalities in the present life, has supplied another and by no means insufficient argument for a future existence. Why is it, in this world, that any of us are content to suffer pain, hardship, ingratitude, neglect, wrong? How is it that we resign ourselves so submissively to disappointment, and rebel not when deprived of the things others enjoy or are possessed of? Is it not in the hope that the inequalities of the moral government in the present sphere will be redressed in the next? What consoles us for partings here if not the assurance of reunions hereafter?

But let us return to our author. "Disjoined from all conventional assertions and religious dogmas," says Sir Edwin, "there are some reflections [about the future life] which may be worth inditing, rather as suggestions to other minds than argument; rather as indications of fresh paths of thought than as presuming to guide along them." These he proceeds to set forth. We can but briefly refer to them. The first is the great mistake of refusing to believe in the continuity of individual life because of its incomprehensibility. "Existence around us," he goes on to say, "illuminated by modern sciences, is full of antecedently incredible occurrences; one more or less makes no logical difference. Does anybody find the doctrine of the Incarnation incredible? The nearest rose-bruh may rebuke him, since he will see there the aphides, which in their wingless state produce without union creatures like themselves; and these again, though uncoupled, bring forth fresh broods, down to the tenth or eleventh generation; when, behold! winged males and females suddenly result and pair." "Miracles" are cheap enough! "Another consideration having some force is that we should find ourselves speculating about this matter at all. All the other aspirations of infancy, youth and manhood turn out more or less, as time rolls, to have been prophecies. . . . There is a significance like the breath of a perpetual whisper from nature in the way in which the theme of his own immortality teases and haunts a man. Note also that he discusses it least and decides about it most dogmatically in those diviner moments when the breath of a high impulse sweeps away work-a-day doubts and selfishnesses. What a blow to the philosophy of negation is the sailor leaping from the taffrail of his ship into an angry sea to save his comrade or to perish with him! He has never read either Plato or Schopenhauer—perhaps not even that heavenly verse, 'Whoso loseth his life for My sake, the same shall save it.' But arguments which are as far beyond philosophy as the unconscious life is deeper than the conscious sufficiently persuade him to plunge."

On the subject of death not staying, but hastening, the development of the individual, Sir Edwin has a fine thought or two with which we must now conclude. "Birth," he remarks, "gave to each of us much; death may give very much more. It may give us subtler senses to behold colours we cannot here see, to catch sounds we do not now hear, and to be aware of bodies and objects impalpable at present to us, but perfectly real, intelligibly constructed, and constituting an organized society and a governed, multiform State. Where does nature show signs of breaking off her magic, that she should stop at the five organs and the sixty or seventy elements? Are we free to spread over the face of this little earth and never freed to spread through the solar system and beyond it? If death ends the man and cosmic convulsions finish off all the constellations, then we arrive at the insane conception of a universe possibly emptied of every form of being, which is the most unthinkable and incredible of all conclusions."

But we cannot continue to draw upon these beautiful re-settings of the "intimations of immortality." As men's minds rise into higher planes of thought and science continues its revelations, they will not be the final word, even in the religion of nature. We could wish that they formed a part of the actual gospel of Buddhism, so barren is it of comfort in the presence of death. Then might we extol the ethics of its founder, and see in his precepts something of more value than the "renunciation" of home and home's sanctities and a sombre loathing of life. Our thanks are not the less due or less unfeignedly accorded to Sir Edwin Arnold. He has given us a glowing picture of a land of vivid colour, of bright flowers, and glad sunshine. A land of song, he has also made it a land of romance. His poetic sympathies and fervid genius have lit up for Western readers an old historic faith. Would that that faith were more worthy the heart-trust of its Eastern disciples, or that, discarding Krishna, they might receive the Christ.—*G. Mercer Adam, in The Week.*

PULPIT SUPPLY.

MR. EDITOR,—For many years the question of supplying vacant congregations has occupied our Church courts, and though a great many schemes have been proposed, and changes made, yet I cannot see that there has been any improvement effected. I know that it is impossible to devise any scheme which will be entirely satisfactory to every congregation, yet I think that there is room for improvement. The question is often asked why churches are so long vacant. Some blame the congregation and say that it is too hard to please; whilst others blame the management of the committee. Now my experience is that in many cases congregations are not to blame. Of course there is very little difficulty in the wealthy churches, where the prospect of a good salary brings many applications for a hearing from suitable ministers. I do not cast any reflections upon these clergymen for trying to better their condition. But in country charges where the stipend is small the case is different. When one of these is vacant there are no applicants from settled pastors, and the choice must be made from those sent by the Presbytery. Now in the congregation with which I am connected, which has been vacant for two years, we have had no opportunity to give a call to a minister, though our people are anxious to have a settled pastor. Whether it be the fault of the Convener or that the rules prevent it, I do not know; but I can assure you that we have not had a chance to give a call to any minister who was in a position to accept it. It seems that the only thing that has been attended to is to send some one to preach to us on Sabbath. Most of those are students, and when a probationer comes for only one Sabbath, coming on Saturday night and going away on Monday morning, we have no opportunity to get acquainted with him or to find out anything about him.

Then we have reason to complain of the students sent. It seems that any young man who offers his services is employed, though he may have had no training nor qualification for the work. We have had boys sent who were utterly unfit to conduct the services. Why send them? Would it not be better to allow some of our elders to take charges for a Sabbath than to employ these schoolboys who are only commencing their studies. In the old country the Church is rather restrictive, for they won't permit any one to preach until he is licensed, but here we go to the opposite extreme and as soon as a boy leaves the high school and enters the university he is considered fit enough to be sent out to vacant congregations. The result is that instead of doing good our congregations are injured; for intelligent people do not wish to go to a church where a boy attempts to teach what he is incapable of teaching. Now I think that students should not be sent out until they have put in at least one year in a theological college. Then a great injustice is done to probationers as well as to congregations. How absurd it is to make a man travel over the country preaching one Sabbath in each place. It is a great expense and does no good. The probationer should be sent two or three Sabbaths to one place, so as to enable the people and him to get acquainted; then if each be satisfied a settlement could be made. As it is many probationers get discouraged and retire, whilst the vacant congregations dwindle so that they become unable to pay a sufficient salary. Hoping that some member of the Assembly may devise some scheme to obviate these evils, I am

A MEMBER OF A VACANT CHURCH.

A THOUSAND-YEAR-OLD STORY.

Here is a story told a thousand years ago by the monks of St. Gaul, which charmingly shows how much good common sense was possessed by the boys' hero, Charlemagne:

When the victorious Karl, after a long absence, returned to Gaul, he sent out for the boys whom he had entrusted to Clement, and bade them show him their compositions and poems. The boys of middle station brought him theirs, sweetened beyond all expectation with every charm of wisdom, but the highborn showed only quite poor and useless stuff. Then Karl, the wise king, following the example of the eternal Judge, placed the good workers upon his right hand and spoke to them as follows: "Many thanks, my sons, that you have taken such pains to carry out my orders to the best of your ability and to your own profit. Try now to reach perfection, and I will give you splendid bishoprics and monasteries, and you shall be highly honoured in my sight."

Thereupon he turned his face in wrath against those upon his left, smote their consciences with his fiery glance, and burst out in terrible scorn in these words: "You highborn sons and of princes, you pretty, dainty little gentlemen who count upon your birth and your wealth, you have disregarded my orders and your own reputations—have neglected your studies and spent your time in high living, in games, or idleness, or foolish occupations." Then he raised his majestic head and his unconquered right hand to heaven, and cried, in a voice of thunder and with his usual oath: "By the Lord of heaven, I care little for your noble birth, and your pretty looks, though others like them so fine. And let me promise this: If you do not make haste to make good your former negligence by careful diligence, never think to get any favours from Karl."

DR. Cæsar, of Tranent, as secretary of the Scottish Bible Society, informed Dundee Presbytery that its operations extended over Scotland, and that applications for Bibles had even been received from Canada and India. It is able to supply ministers with copies at less than prime cost; and the circulation now amounts to 20,000 annually.